



Farmers Recognized for Top-Notch Conservation Efforts

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MADISON – Secretary Ben Brancel today recognized four Wisconsin farmers for exemplary soil and water conservation efforts on their farms.

The four are David Meyer, **River Falls**; Heather Flashinski, **Cadott**; and Kathy Ruggles and John Thomas, **Downsville**. During a meeting of the Board of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Brancel presented them with plaques citing them "for practicing exemplary conservation on Wisconsin's working lands and for preserving our agricultural heritage for generations to come."

All are participants in the Conservation Stewardship Program, a voluntary program of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The program accepts producers who already practice good stewardship on their crop, grazing and forest lands, and offers incentives to them to take additional steps. The award winners had the highest-scoring applications in the last ranking period.

David Meyer custom raises dairy heifers in Pierce County, along with raising cattle, grain and hay. He uses conservation practices to control erosion next to a high-value trout stream, and fencing to keep livestock out of the stream while allowing wildlife to pass through.

Heather Flashinski is a beginning farmer in Chippewa County who grazes cattle and chickens. In addition to these and other conservation practices already in place, she planted a tree border and improved her pastures by interseeding legumes.

Kathy Ruggles and John Thomas farm in a high-risk area of Dunn County between two ox bow lakes. They have restored 20 acres to prairie, manage their forest land, and are targeting five acres for invasive species removal.

James Bramblett, State Conservationist for NRCS in Wisconsin, said, "We congratulate these stewards of the land on this award recognizing their sound management of their farms and their resources. We're proud of all the more than 2,000 Wisconsin farmers who have successfully enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program. They prove every day that taking care of the land brings long-term productivity for our farmland, pastures and forests."

Brancel said, "It's important to preserve farmland, but it's just as important to preserve the quality of that land, so it keeps on producing for the future. These producers are leading the way, showing that you can protect our land and waters and still have a profitable enterprise."

Last year nearly 500 Wisconsin farmers and forest landowners enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program, collecting an average payment of more than \$6,400 for a total of \$3 million. Now in its third year in Wisconsin, the program has enrolled over 760,000 acres. Nationwide, more than 50 million acres are in the program.

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